

City Space, Our Space

Tired of waiting for the city of Montreal to repaint crosswalk lines at Waverly St. and Bernard St., parents from the neighbourhood took matters into their own hands. In early September, one mother used a paint roller to make bright yellow crosswalk lines across the road leading to Lambert Closse Elementary School. Parents were reclaiming the streets of their neighbourhood and were sending a strong message to the municipal government: "If the city is not addressing our needs as citizens, we will."

This incident speaks to the heart of what we wish to address in this issue, "Places and Spaces: A look at urban living." As Montreal grows and changes, we wanted to look at how we, its residents, and the city itself are adapting. How do we interact with our neighbours and with the cityscape?

Public spaces are where our freedoms of speech and assembly are protected. In public spaces, we are reminded of an essential civics lesson: We are all in this together.

An important aspect of this is asking who the city belongs to. With billboards and high-rises, condos and ad-trucks taking up more of our visual and living space, it is increasingly difficult to tell which areas of our city are not for sale.

Currently, many Montrealers are debating what we should see in the skies around us. From the expansion of Molson Stadium on the slopes of Mount-Royal to corporate logos proclaiming their presence in la belle ville, issues concerning public space abound. In "Sign Language?", Frances Millerd explores one of the more iconic corporate constructs of our city - the Farine Five Roses sign - and what role



it plays in the way Montrealers experience their city.

Alongside what we see in our skies, non-visible forces are also helping reshape the city's public landscape. New technologies, built for the free distribution of wireless internet and set up in public spaces, have the potential to foster a new form of 'digital citizenship.' Ile Sans Fil, a community group dedicated to free wireless internet access, is leading the charge in Montreal for community control of the WiFi waves. In "Dawn of the Digital City," Brendan K. Edwards explores both the local and international influence of this innovative team of volunteer techies.

Public space is perhaps typified by the parks and public squares that dot Montreal's diverse neighbourhoods and boroughs. These provide both a space for public gathering and solitary thoughts, without a fee for admission. While it is often easy for most Montrealers to take them for granted, they are in fact a necessity for others who have no other place to go. Tim McSorley takes a look at what happens when the last of Montreal's downtown public squares come under curfew in "Out of the Parks and into the Alleys."

Our cityscape is always changing, and the articles in this issue are only a sampling of what we see every day in Montreal. The cities where we live, the communities where we grow, are at the heart of how we can work together to define society. Attempts to privatize and limit public space diminish the democratic dreams of ordinary citizens and make us forget that we have the power to achieve them.



Citizens protesting against the planned name change of Parc Ave. to Robert-Bourassa. Photo by Nick King-Edwards

Letters

What's next Mont-Tremblay?

Dear Siafu,

Let's hope we have a chance to keep our Ave. du Parc, a street that our family has used for over thirty years now. It is a street with history, a multi-ethnic history, a street that runs through our park on the edge of our mountain. It would seem that the mayor gives with one hand by taking down the spaghetti interchange which marred the connection, only to take away a sense of place and belonging with the other. What's next? Mont Royal will become Mont Tremblay? Where does it end? Let's remember our fight for the coops in Milton-Park. Let's stop this. - L. Friesen

The Throne Read

Israel Boycott Brief

Over 600 people attended a conference "Boycotting Israeli Apartheid: The Struggle Continues", held in October in Toronto. Leading anti-apartheid activists from Palestine, South Africa, Canada, and England addressed the way forward in the global campaign of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS).

The Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (CAIA), which organized the event, was formed in response to the call by 171 Palestinian organizations for the international community to implement a BDS strategy against apartheid Israel.

Participants developed a program to move the BDS campaign forward in different sectors, including labor, campus, local neighborhoods, media, research, art, culture and faith-based communities. For more information, www.caiaweb.org.

Mexico- Looming Strike if Union Leader's Name is not Cleared

Napoleon Gomez Urrutia, leader of the 280,000-member National Union of Miners and Metalworkers in Mexico (NUMM), took refuge in British Columbia. After being blamed for embezzling \$55 million in union funds, he was secretly removed by the government and forced to leave the country. He was removed after publicly accusing a Mexican-owned mining company of "industrial homicide", following a mining explosion that took the lives of 65 workers.

The workers of major mining operations across the country walked out in solidarity. The NUMM is a major advocate for worker's rights and democratic reforms in the wake of this summer's disputed Mexican presidential elections. Rotating strikes have been held calling for new elections.

Canada: Institutionalized Discrimination in Prison System

The federal prison system discriminates against Aboriginal people, according to the most recent report of the Correctional Investigator, Howard Sapers.

The report outlines how First Nations, Métis and Inuit inmates are

routinely disadvantaged in correctional institutions. They are regularly classified as higher security risks and are more likely to be placed under segregation than other inmates.

While Aboriginal people make up 3 percent of the Canadian population, they account for 18.5 percent of the federal prison population. The incarceration rate for Aboriginal people is 9 times higher than non-Aboriginals.

Ivory Coast: Cocoa Farmers on Strike

Cocoa farmers along the Ivory Coast held a strike in October to demand higher prices and more financing for cooperative farmers.

Farmers burnt mountains of beans and held demonstrations in front of the offices of the Coffee and Cocoa Bourse in Abidjan. They also blocked all roads leading to all major ports in the country.

The West African country is the world's top grower of cocoa, producing 40 percent of the global cocoa output each year.

Afghanistan: Canadian Troops Dazed in Marijuana Forest

Canadian troops are facing a new problem in Afghanistan: Taliban forces are using marijuana forests for

protection. The plants, according to General Rick Hillier, chief of the Canadian forces staff, absorb energy and heat, which allow Taliban forces to evade thermal detecting devices. "It's very difficult to penetrate with thermal devices ... you really have to be careful that the Taliban don't dodge in and out of those marijuana forests," the general said at a press conference in Ottawa.

Soldiers tried burning the plants with white phosphorous and diesel to no avail. "A couple of brown plants on the edges of some of those forests did catch fire. But a section of soldiers that was downwind from that had some ill effects and decided that was probably not the right course of action," Hillier remarked.

One battalion tried to adapt to the situation by camouflaging their vehicle with marijuana plants.

ant vs. ELEPHANT

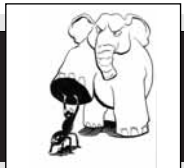
Ant: Migrant farm workers

In late September, migrant workers on three farms in Quebec and one in Manitoba voted to unionise. Unpaid forced overtime, deplorable on-site living conditions, and the use of dangerous chemicals without adequate protection are a few of the complaints from the 18,000 Mexican and Caribbean workers who work under the Summer Agricultural Work Program (SAWP). Workers have been unable to confront their employers, since they can be summarily fired and have no right to appeal. The Quebec Labour relations board will announce its decision on the unionisation in early November.

Elephant: SAWP Employers

SAWP employers often pay migrant workers much less than what Canadian workers are paid. Many of the agricultural companies have also been accused of firing workers for filing complaints, with one worker claiming he was fired for union organising. SAWP employers in Quebec are contesting the unionisation bid, claiming the workers do not qualify to unionise since they don't work all year round. Organisers also accused the farm owners of delaying delivery of a complete list of employees certifying that they have garnered a 50 percent-plus-one majority.

updates: www.ufcw.ca or www.tuac.ca.



Graphic by: Jai G.

Sign Language?

'Farine Five Roses': ugly corporate symbol or lightning rod for the public imagination

Frances Millerd



Photo courtesy of University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections.

The towering 4.5-metre letters of the Farine Five Roses sign appear on your computer screen as they stand in Griffintown, only now they are about 2 centimetres tall, and you can drag and drop to rearrange the 15 letters into a sequence of your choice. FARINE FIVE ROSES. IF FIRE EVES ARSON. FFR VIE NO ERASE. NOSE FEVER IS FAIR. This is the Anagram Game, one of the features of the Save Farine Five Roses blog, launched last August in response to the threat of the neon giant's removal.

Is it strange to create a blog with the intent of saving a neon sign from destruction? Is it strange to make a game of rearranging the letters of a monolith that has blazed in the Montreal skyline for almost 60 years? The question of the sign's fate draws attention to the possibility that high-rise signs occupy not only a place in the skyline, but in the minds and lives of people who live with them. Once you start talking to people, it turns out that signs are more complex than the corporate names they represent.

Sometimes the corporate meaning is complex in itself. The Farine Five Roses sign is a prime example of this. Originally reading "Farine Ogilvie

Flour", then "Farine Five Roses Flour", and finally simply "Farine Five Roses", the sign carries the history of the birth of branding and the language laws of the Quiet Revolution. It also marks the sale of a Canadian brand to international conglomerate Archer Daniels Midland, and then, more recently, J.M. Smucker Co. In addition, it has a current commercial implication. You can still walk into a supermarket and pick up a bag of flour that's marked with that same name that monopolizes the skyline from several directions.

Concordia Communications professor Matt Soar is the creator of the Save Farine Five Roses blog. He is also the man behind the Logo Cities Project, which is all about talking to people about signs and exploring the cultural lives of the logo. The multimedia web project in progress showcases a dialogue between professionals and the public, collecting interviews and anecdotes on the subject of signs.

Branislav "Bill" Kovacevic of Enseignes Transworld and Derek Drummond of the Architecture Department at McGill University both encounter signs in their working lives but share little in their viewpoint. Not

surprisingly, sign manufacturer Kovacevic bemoans new city bylaws, which restrict high-rise signs to a maximum of 10 feet by 10 feet, rather than the previous standard of several stories. There are almost 2 kilometres of neon tubing inside the two Sociabank logos on the Tour Scotia at the corner of Sherbrooke and Metcalfe. Kovecevic celebrates these types of signs. "Where you have life, commercial vitality of the city? why not . . . What's the problem?" asks Kovacevic in the Logo Cities interview. On the other hand, Drummond, professor of architecture, reacted to the increase in high-rise signage in the early nineties by lamenting in an article in the Gazette that "Montreal's skyline has developed a rash, a series of nasty neon brightly coloured blemishes; pimples on the pinnacles of progress."

The debate between Drummond and Kovacevic is largely an aesthetic one. After all, whether you think it's handsome or hideous, a sign is a piece of design. Kovacevic trumpets the underappreciated creativity of the sign-maker; for example, illuminating the CBC tower logos so that they appear white during the day and red at night by an arrangement of strips of red

vinyl and lights on the interior of the sign. Drummond cringes at signs that are applied to buildings after the fact, and their lack of integration with the architecture. "I really find it hard to get emotionally connected to a sign of any sort, any piece of advertizing," Drummond explains in an interview. "I can get emotionally connected to a building and a space, I have no problem with that. But I tend to try to sort of block out the sign."

When it comes to relic signs such as Farine Five Roses, the contention between sign-maker and architect is mellowed. The size of the sign, as well as its neon open channel technology, is archaic. No company will ever build a sign like this again. Kovacevic expresses great nostalgia toward signs of the Five Roses era, though he rhapsodizes with equal excitement over contemporary signs. Drummond accepts that Farine Five Roses has been absorbed into the city, though he still expresses a certain amount of distaste. "We're so used to them," he says of antiquated signs. "They're truly ugly in many ways. The fact that a corporation has a sign that big, it's revolting, but we love it, because it's now part of the city."

The "sign stories" of the Logo Cities Project, personal anecdotes gathered from the public, stand in contrast to Drummond and Kovacevic's point of view. Aesthetics and bylaws are no longer subject to scrutiny. The meanings of signs seem to float freely in the public imagination. In one striking example, a woman describes driving through the city on a rainy night and mistaking a large, white high-rise sign for the moon. She dismisses the mistake, only to discover that her friend in the passenger seat had the same experience. In another story, a woman recounts meeting another

woman with "Farine Five Roses" tattooed on her foot, because it was the first thing she saw when she arrived in Montreal by train. Many people share stories that describe signs as landmarks and way-finding devices. The meaning becomes "this is my exit," "I'm walking north," or "five minutes from home." The corporate roots of the signs are not mentioned. The meaning

"The fact that a corporation has a sign that big, it's revolting, but we love it, because it's now part of the city."

- Derek Drummond of the Architecture Department at McGill University

is elsewhere. And for better or worse, at least one Montrealer has gotten emotionally connected enough to a sign to want it etched into her skin.

The Anagram Game on the Save Farine Five Roses blog can serve as a metaphor for this process of refurbishing a landscape of signs with more personal significance. However, while the cultural meanings of signs can be disjointed from corporate roots, there are limitations to what the public makes of them. No matter how clever you are at word games, you are limited to the 15 letters of the original sign, and the 4.5-metre neon letters looming over Griffintown will remain spelling "Farine Five Roses." The woman who mistook the high-rise sign for the moon would not have mistaken it for a thunderbolt. The sign's shape, colour, and placement guided her imagining. The capacity of city dwellers to project

their own meanings onto signs should not be underestimated, but neither should the ability of signs to limit those projections, and project their own meanings back.

The relationship between signs and people is as difficult as it is interesting. Can it benefit the city that a company can buy the design, space, and technology to resemble the moon?

Is "Farine Five Roses" really the image indelibly marked in the mind of people arriving in Montreal? Drummond is critical, calling increased high-rise signage "indicative of a trend toward the commercialization of yet another aspect of our environment." And it surely is that, but in the case of at least some signs, it has become something else as well.

Whether we like it or not, signs are part of the urban fabric of daily life in Montreal, and not just because they are designed to be seen. The complex relationships between people and signs make the signs more interesting than if they were regarded with blithe nostalgia or simple disdain. While I like my feet just fine without the "Farine Five Roses" monolith, we might do well to take an interest in what comes down from our skyline as well as what goes up.

Out of the Parks and into the Alleys

Forcing the city's homeless population out of the public eye and under the rug

Tim McSorley



Photo by Marjolaine Lord.

Surrounded by busy streets at the western edge of downtown Montreal, Cabot Square serves as a point of departure for buses heading to the western reaches of the island. The square's broad limbed, leafy trees and sparsely grassed grounds still manage to somehow give it the appearance of an urban oasis. Over the years it has become a hub for Montreal's homeless, and not only because of its many benches and trees: until recently, it was also one of the last public areas in Montreal that remained open all night long. But on this cool, October night, the square stands empty, its last occupant - a grey-bearded man carrying a couple of overstuffed duffle bags and wearing an army surplus jacket - having shuffled off at 11:45pm. Since the beginning of September, a new sign hangs at the south west corner of the park; now late October, the metallic sign is still a brilliant white, wavering gently in the breeze. The sign is similar to the old one, except for one, short line at the bottom. "Acces Interdit," it reads, "de Oh a 6h."

In August, Montreal's Ville-Marie borough council placed the last 15 public squares that were allowed to remain open overnight, including Cabot Square, under a midnight to 6am curfew. The change, according to borough mayor Benoit Labonté, places these public spaces under the same regulations as every other park in Montreal. But voices are piling up in protest, demanding a valid explanation for why the move was necessary.

"It's a message of intolerance," says Pierre Gaudreau, director of the Réseau d'aide des personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal. "The message was clear for homeless people: there's no place to go."

"We needed to ensure that these parks didn't become areas for drug dealing and prostitution,"

- Benoit Labonté, Ville-Marie Mayor

The change in rules is estimated to affect about 50 homeless Montrealers. In addition to Cabot Square, there is a wide range of other areas affected, from Place Jacques Cartier in Old Montreal to Place de la Paix at the corner of St-Laurent and René-Lévesque.

Gaudreau is also concerned the curfew may make the work of street outreach groups much more difficult. "Even the police chief of station 21 [downtown] has said that instead of having 15 homeless people in one spot, we will end up with 15 homeless people in 15 different places," he explains.

It's all about community

Recently contacted by Siafu, Mayor Labonté says the decision was a matter of administrative housekeeping. "These were places that were forgotten when the original Montreal parks by-law was passed in the 1960s," he says. "All we did was put these other fifteen parks in line." The by-law allows police to give tickets of up to \$141 to people found to be sitting or sleeping in parks during the curfew hours.

Pressed for why the move was made now, he states that it was a response to growing complaints from residents about the safety of the parks. "We needed

to ensure that these parks didn't become areas for drug dealing and prostitution," says Labonté, adding it is up to the city to ensure the safety of its citizens.

Such statements, though, inevitably raise the question of who is looking out for the safety of Montreal's homeless population and to what degree the homeless are considered equal citizens. "Montreal's homeless are now less safe, because this moves them into alleyways," says Toni Coschand, executive director of Dans La Rue, a Montreal street youth aid and outreach organisation.

Most shocking to many homeless aid organisations was the lack of consultation. According to the Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérantes de Montréal (RAPSIM), which has worked on a committee with city and municipal police representatives for a year now, and the Old Brewery Mission, one of Montreal's largest shelters, there was no forewarning of the change.

"Mr. Labonté campaigned on a platform of greater consultation," says Gaudreau. "To not consult with groups over a decision with such impact is unacceptable."

More importantly, says James Hughes, director of the Old Brewery, the homeless of Montreal themselves had no say in the matter.

"The city had a great opportunity here," says Hughes. "They could have said 'We have a problem here. Let's get to know the homeless population, and figure out a solution' ... Instead, they've just displaced the problem."

The last study of homelessness in Montreal took place in 1998. The study, conducted by the Institut de la statis-

Giovane
navigatore
découvreur



Ville de Montréal

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tique du Québec, showed that of the 28,000 Montrealers who used a shelter, day centre or soup kitchen that year, over 12,500 reported that they had been without a home within the past 12 months. While there has been no follow-up study, there is consensus that the number has risen, with some estimating the number of Montreal homeless today at over 20,000. Of the 12,500 shelter users, a small but significant number make their way living on the streets. While Hughes says there are enough beds in Montreal for all the homeless who would want them, he also understands why there are those who reject the shelter system.

Many people, for instance, feel unsafe in shelters, says Hughes. While public squares may serve as a communal space, they also afford their users with greater distance from their neighbours (a luxury not always possible in shelters), as well as the possibility of leaving should they feel the need to pick up and go. Many also suffer from mental illness or drug addiction, something most shelters - which work off tight resources and tighter budgets - simply aren't equipped to deal with. The strict rules on curfew (doors close at 9pm) and zero tolerance for intoxication means many people cannot sleep in shelters.

Criminalising the homelessness?

RAPSIM will be bringing their concerns over the changes to the Quebec Human Rights Commission. They worry that their work to improve the situation of the homeless in Montreal will be drastically set back by these changes. Since 2005, RAPSIM has been working with Montreal city councillors, police officers and private security agents to

curb the higher than average number of tickets issued to homeless people who are generally unable to pay their fines. While Montreal police have said that the rate of ticketing has dropped by 50% in the past two years, Gaudreau is worried that banning the homeless from parks and squares will reverse the trend. He also notes that a minor ticket can lead to devastating results. "Tickets are sometimes sent to shelters, or [the homeless] don't show up in court, meaning they end up receiving jail-time."

Coschand points out that although the new law is meant to satisfy the residents of certain neighbourhoods, it may in fact undermine their concerns in the end. "Where will [the homeless] end up?" asks Coschand. "In alleyways and under people's windows? We're just shuffling them around."

Not just a Montreal problem

Places like Calgary and Victoria have similar curfews for parks. Catherine Boies-Parker, a Victoria lawyer, has brought a charter challenge to the B.C. Supreme Court, claiming the city's regulation violates the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. "Canada has signed various treaties on the eradication of homelessness and reduction of poverty," says Boies-Parker. "We are certain [the city] cannot interfere if people create shelter, if it is not being adequately provided [by the city]."

While the situation in Montreal is slightly different, the underlying issue, according to Gaudreau, remains the same: that society has a duty to look out for its homeless population and cannot simply regulate them out of existence. "We're watching the case very closely," he says. In fact, RAPSIM has not ruled

out the legal route, if they are not satisfied with the outcome of their challenge at the Quebec Human Rights Commission.

A matter of public space

Boies-Parker says that there has been such a break down in social services that the problem of homelessness will not disappear with a positive court ruling alone.

While both Gaudreau and Hughes agree that Montreal has been fairly positive in this regard, this latest decision has made them much more sceptical. Instead of banning the homeless, Gaudreau would have preferred to see more publicly-run toilets and showers, simple amenities that could go a long way to helping those living on the streets feel they have greater control over themselves and their situations.

Also concerning is the lack of resources for dealing with drug and alcohol addiction and mental illness. "It is a fact that a large number of people living on the streets also have mental health issues," says Coschand, of Dans La Rue. "They aren't dangerous to themselves or others - otherwise, assumedly, they would be hospitalised - but they are not well enough to be integrated into the shelter system." Hughes echoes these remarks, regretting that the lack of resources in shelters leads to stricter rules on who has access.

In the end, though, it is clear the solution won't come from simply allowing people to sleep in parks or providing greater services in homeless shelters. What is really needed is a commitment from both Montreal's citizens and its politicians to work together, alongside the homeless, to solve this deeper issue.

"The journey out of homelessness is a hard journey, it needs to be an accompanied journey," says Hughes. "Often, it is more successful when it isn't travelled alone."

For some, that trip may now be lonelier than ever.

Lillian Robinson Passes the Torch

Former Principal of Concordia's Simone de Beauvoir Institute left a lasting mark

Aaron Lakoff

I'm here because of Lillian, I fight because Lillian fought

It is with sadness that I write to share memories of a friend and comrade, Lillian Robinson, who died the morning of September 20th of ovarian cancer. I feel compelled to write this because Lillian brought me where I am at this particular point in my life, and for that I am grateful.

In early June, I went into Lillian's office at the Simone de Beauvoir institute at Concordia to meet with her. While I looked at her across a desktop cluttered with books, papers, and flyers, we discussed my enrollment in Women's Studies at Concordia. I told her about my distaste for academia, and my worry that studying feminism in a university setting might divorce it from social struggles in real life.

Later, Lillian handed me a set of keys, and sent me off to explore the basement of the Institute. She wanted to know if the basement would be big enough to perform a play about Emma Goldman in which I was taking part. This is what I loved about Lillian - her absolute support and encouragement, not only for my activism and the things I love, but her support for social justice everywhere.

About one month later, in mid-July, Israeli bombs started tearing apart Beirut and numerous towns and villages in Lebanon. As lives were being crushed in the Middle-East, Lillian's own life had come under attack from cancer. We took to the streets so many times this summer and consoled friends who had family members and loved-ones in Beirut. It was hard being a Jew in these demonstrations, knowing that the terrorism of the Israeli state was being done in my name. I could feel Lillian's absence in the streets and in the demonstrations.

You see, Lillian was also such a strong voice in the Palestinian soli-

arity movement, devoting a large part of her life to speaking out against Israeli terrorism and the occupation. As a founding member of the Jewish Alliance Against the Occupation (JAAO), she helped to carve out an important place for Jewish dissident voices in a world where all Jews are with Israel or with the "terrorists." As Jews against the occupation, we are on the side of the Palestinian popular resistance, and Lillian never shied away from that position.

In fact, I came to know Lillian through my involvement with the JAAO, sitting in meetings with her and others many times in the back room of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute. And when I made the decision to travel to the Occupied Palestinian Territories in early 2005, Lillian gave me encouragement and support.

I never got to see Lillian in the hospital. In her last few weeks, she was not feeling well enough to take many visitors. Instead, I sent her a photo of a banner our Jewish contingent made during one of the demonstrations against the war in Lebanon. The banner read "Israeli Terror is Not a Jewish Value." We were inspired by Lillian.

Lillian also encouraged and challenged me to look at wars and occupation through an anti-racist, pro-feminist lens. We spent many hours on the phone together as she would tell me about the women's movement and its involvement in anti-war mobilizations of generations-past. After I returned from working as a journalist in Haiti this year, she was eager to hear my stories, particularly those about women labour organizers in Port-au-Prince.

I am now just beginning my degree at the Simone de Beauvoir Institute, where Lillian was principal. In large part, I am here because of her. She has profoundly shaped my life in



the two years that I knew her. I think it would make Lillian happy to know that she had this effect on people.

In fact, just hours after the news of her death, there were smiles coming through the tears of many students and faculty around the Institute. I cannot look down. In this sad time, I feel particularly moved and inspired to continue fighting for a free Palestine and for social revolution. Lillian led a life devoted to social justice struggles, and many more will pick up where she left off.

I will miss you, comrade.

Aaron Lakoff is a social justice organizer and independent journalist from Montreal. He is active around anti-imperialist and anti-racist struggles in Montreal, and is a member of Block the Empire, Solidarity Across Borders, and the International Solidarity Movement. He is starting a degree in Women's Studies at Concordia University.

To view Aaron's previous writings, visit aaron.resist.ca.

Lillian's Memorial Service will be Sunday, November 12th from 2:00 - 4:00 P.M. at Concordia University's Loyola Chapel, 7141 Sherbrooke St. West.

Dawn of the Digital City

Brendan K. Edwards

At 11:00 on Sunday night I receive an email from Alexis Cornellier, the director of operations for the Montreal-based community wireless network Île Sans Fil (ISF): "It's a go for the installation tomorrow, I know I'm last minute, but that's the life of a ninja."

Early the next morning, I find myself waiting in a hallway on the third floor of Centre St-Pierre on Panet St. while Alexis and Jeff Schallenberg, another Île Sans Fil volunteer, quickly load up on computer cable. The two will spend the rest of their day installing routers at new locations and maintaining some of the community group's 110 wireless hotspots. Alexis has long blond hair and is equipped with a laptop and large headphones connected to his cell-phone with Bluetooth wireless technology. Jeff is sporting a black baseball cap with the Île Sans Fil logo and a red dress shirt tucked neatly into his khaki pants. In addition to the mini Fuji laptop in his backpack, he is palming a pocket-sized personal digital assistant (PDA) that he uses to determine the range of wi-fi signals at ISF locations. By 10:30 AM the volunteers have deposited their gear into Jeff's car and we are speeding west on Rene-Lesveque Boulevard towards one of ISF's most frequented hotspots.

Over the past three years, ISF has become one of the most successful community wireless networks (CWN) in Canada. In March 2005, they received the Montreal 'Prix d'Innovation Sociale' for their work which now provides free public wireless internet for 25,000 Montrealers. Although ISF's main goal is to set up as many free

wireless Internet hotspots as possible, the group also strives to create software that will give Montrealers the tools to engage in their local communities. Unlike other Canadian community wireless groups, ISF's definition of public space includes not only public squares and parks, but also cafés and bars. When people log-on at an ISF 'hotspot', they are treated to a wide range of content specific to that particular location - including everything from listings of local cultural events to videos of Montreal-based performance artists. In October, ISF launched the HAL (Hub des Artistes Locaux) project, which allows patrons in a dozen Montreal venues to take in local independent video-blogs (including a flash-mob pillow fight that took place at Dorchester Square earlier this year) and listen to podcasts. ISF also plans to use its software to list profiles of each location's Member of Parliament and the coordinates of nearby Eco-Quartiers.

As a number of municipalities and private corporations across North America jump on the wi-fi bandwagon, community wireless networks such as Île Sans Fil are demonstrating an increasing potential to make an impact on the future of city-wide wi-fi networks. "We're fighting for a public discussion about how this information infrastructure is being set up," says Michael Lenczner, one of the founders of ISF. "Who controls it? What oversight do they have? And how much do they have to respond to the public interest?"

Île Sans Fil was founded in June 2003 by Michael Lenczner, David

Graphic by: Jai G.



Vincelli and Mina Naguib, who set up their first hotspot at Café Utopik on the corner of Berri and Ste-Catherine. Early on, the group drafted a social contract that would prohibit their business partners from charging customers for wireless Internet access. When ISF realized that their technology would not support an expanding wireless network they enlisted the help of a few friends and developed their own. The following year witnessed the birth of "wi-fi dog": an innovative new form of software that would allow customizable portal pages for each of ISF's locations. Soon after, the ISF volunteers hit the pavement offering routers to cafés and bars for a yearly donation of \$50. Amid rumors that their competitors were planning to expand, the members of ISF began setting up an increasing amount of hotspots on St. Laurent Boulevard. Later in their first year, ISF established a relationship with the Mobile Digital Commons Network (a collaborative research project launched by Concordia University, the city of Montreal and the Banff New Media Institute) who set them up with \$20,000 worth of hardware. Developing

“They were all asking us: ‘Well what are you doing?’ It’s a useless kind of thing, you’re just helping yuppies.”

- Michael Lenczner, Île Sans Fil



partnerships with local business owners, who doubted whether a group of volunteers could guarantee a reliable wi-fi service, was not as easy. “For the first year we had to bang on doors to convince people,” says Lenczner.

Fast-forward to 2006 and the roles have reversed, with ISF volunteers hustling to keep up with requests for their services. In addition, the group has become an active member in the North American wireless movement and their “wifi-dog” software is off its leash, being put to use by 25 different CWNs in cities all over the world. “Their appearance on the scene reinvigorated the whole community wireless movement,” says Dana Spiegel of the pioneering CWN NYC Wireless.

11:30 am: Alexis and Jeff have set up a second hotspot for Lasalle College, providing free access for a growing number of students who need their daily wi-fi fix. As the two men scurry through the school’s lobby, Alexis nods at a couple of mannequins decked out in trendy outfits courtesy of the college’s fashion design students. “I should get them to make ninja

costumes for the ISF volunteers,” he laughs.

Later Alexis explains that he calls the ISF installation team ninjas because they operate below the radar, and have highly developed sets of specialized skills. “The job of a ninja is not the most gratifying job,” he says. “We look like everyone else, but we aren’t like everyone else and people don’t understand why we do it for free.” The core group of ISF volunteers is a varied mix of technology workers, students, community activists, and artists. Alexis, who works as a computer salesman for the information co-op at UQUAM (Université du Québec à Montréal), says that he joined ISF out of a need to connect with a community away from his home computer. “Before ISF, I was playing *World of Warcraft* and found that my dwarf that had reached the sixteenth level was more skilled than I was,” he says. Michael Lenczner points out that although they have different backgrounds, the ISF members are united by their common view of technology. “There is a political sensibility of technology being a tool that should serve a community’s interest,” he says.

Despite their social orientation, ISF has often been criticized by other Montreal-based non-profit groups for providing services for people who frequent trendy cafes while ignoring the fact that the city’s low-income residents cannot afford laptops. “We’ve gotten flak for that, especially in the beginning,” says Lenczner. “They were all asking us:

‘Well what are you doing? It’s a useless kind of thing, you’re just helping yuppies.’” However, members of the community wireless movement paint a different picture of ISF. Dana Spiegel says that NYC Wireless uses “wifi-dog” to provide wireless internet for educational purposes at a computer center in a low-income housing development in New York City. He argues that by donating technology designed with community values (such as the capability to set up different portal pages that address the specific needs of people in various locations), ISF and NYC Wireless are playing a vital part in tackling social issues. “It’s really not us who are doing this directly per se, but our tools and the tools that ISF provides are addressing this issue,” says Spiegel.

1:30 pm: Alexis and Jeff have an appointment with the manager of *Chez Gauthier* on Parc Avenue and Milton. The manager complains that people in the parking lot are logging on to the restaurant’s wireless internet. Alexis patiently explains that the signal is meant to be available beyond the restaurant walls and it is impossible to block it. When I point out that this means that the restaurant’s portal page is also available in the Presse Café across the street, Alexis laughs. “It’s radio waves - they can’t do anything about it.”

As ISF continues to expand, offering free service in an increasing number of locations, many of the city’s smaller wireless internet companies have given up charging for access in downtown bars and cafes. However, Bell and Rogers own the lion’s share of the city’s spectrum, and are still determined to make a profit on the wireless internet market. In the Montreal and Ottawa area alone, the duopoly owns \$5 million worth of the spectrum allocated by Industry Canada. “All of the proprietary spectrum that belongs to the city of Montreal, has already been



Jeff Schallenberg is sitting in the middle foreground, Alexis Cornellier is sitting on the steps behind Jeff (long blond hair) and Michael Lenczner is standing at the top of the steps. They are at a volunteer meeting with other ISF volunteers. - Photo by Jazz Manning.

sold to the major Telco operators," affirms Allison Powell, the former Academic Liason for ISF who has spent three years researching Canadian CWNs. "What they are going to do with it is another question."

Meanwhile, CWNs like ISF are relegated to the small license-exempt section of the spectrum that is only useful at 200 feet and is fielding an increasing amount of traffic. Many are questioning whether or not more space will be added to this area of the license-exempt spectrum before the high level of traffic renders it useless. Michael A. Geist who holds a Canada Research Chair in Internet and E-commerce Law at the University of Ottawa, notes that he is not sure whether Industry Canada will make more license-exempt spectrum available. "One would hope that policymakers and governments would do so," says Geist. "Yet there is a danger that the government will be addicted to revenue-generating spectrum auctions."

According to Industry Canada's spectrum engineering department, the current amount of license-exempt spectrum is more than adequate and Industry Canada regularly consults with community wireless groups. However, Michael Lenczner says that the group has never been contacted by Industry Canada and when ISF took it upon themselves and arranged a meeting, it did not lead to anything concrete.

5:30 pm: As he sits across from Alexis in an office in Mile End, spectrum policy is the last thing on Jeff's mind. Instead he is contemplating the gap that exists in ISF's wi-fi network at the corner of St-Laurent and Prince Arthur. "The Café Depot on Prince Arthur would be the perfect place to fill the gap. They have wireless Internet

but it doesn't work," he says, pumping his fist for emphasis. The office belongs to Sandra Felon the executive director of the Societe de Development (SDC) du Boulevard St-Laurent. Felon is also interested closing the gap in ISF's network on the Main and has offered some financial support for the project.

Despite the subsidies that ISF has received from the SDC, the municipal government has ignored the group over the last three years. Last summer, when the Ville Marie borough launched a feasibility study into a wi-fi pilot project downtown, no one from ISF was contacted. Despite a number of editorials in the mainstream press arguing that Montreal should provide funding for ISF, the group has to have received any phone calls. The city is waiting until 2025 to provide a broad connectivity project and it is yet to be determined whether a future project will involve an agreement with a local community organization or private companies.

Powell notes that it is difficult to say how much impact ISF will have on the municipal wi-fi debate, especially as they are not involved in government lobbying. "Their mandate has always been action oriented and less interested in political or policy issues," she says. However, Lenczner is convinced that the technology that ISF has created and the network they have built are political acts in and of themselves. He argues that people who know what ISF has achieved will automatically compare any plan for a municipal wireless project to the community group's network. "People will be like, 'Île Sans Fil doesn't have advertising, why do you have advertising?'" says Lenczner. "Or they'll ask 'why don't you have it for free?'"

A couple of days after I criss-crossed the city with the ISF volunteers, I speak with Alexis over the phone. I'm curious to find out what he thinks of the city's plan for a future public wireless project. As always, he is quick to respond. "We won't need the Internet at all in 2025. We'll have chips implanted in our heads and we'll each have our own satellite." In the meantime, does he think that ISF will take on an increasingly political role? "Not quite yet, but maybe we're at the dawn of it."

To find an Île Sans Fil hotspot hear you: www.ilesansfil.org.

Tech Terms:

Radio Spectrum: The range of wavelengths used for broadcasting radio, television and wireless internet.

Hotspots: These are points at which broadband Internet signals are broadcast wirelessly to the surrounding area. Internet access is generally available up to three hundred metres from the source signal, but more coverage is possible when using an exterior antenna. Île Sans Fil uses hotspots to provide a simple way for local businesses and organizations to share bandwidth, and as a means of displaying local art and promoting local community engagement with technology.

Web portal: The portal is the site that is intended to be the first place people visit when using the Web. Typically a "portal site" has a catalog of web sites, a search engine, or both.

Wi-Fi: Wireless Fidelity. A popular term for a form of wireless data communication.

Many Faces of Mexican Resistance

An overview of social movements from Mexico city to Oaxaca

Francesca Manning

Over the last year, people across Mexico from all walks of life have participated in a widespread surge in civil resistance unprecedented in recent Mexican history. This resistance has many faces - indigenous, mestizo, white, and everything between - all genders, sexualities, ages and class backgrounds. There is conflict among the movements, but also a sense of common purpose: It is a complex resistance to the overarching neo-liberalization of the government and institutions of Mexico. The country has a long and vibrant history of radical resistance, and another shift in power relations appears to be taking place right now.

MEXICO CITY

In Mexico City, protesters against the alleged electoral fraud early this summer, in which Felipe Calderon Hinojosa favored by the voting poor lost to conservative Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, effectively shut down 9 km of the main street in the centre of the financial district for 48 days, erecting a city of tents and sit-ins. The "planton" (squat), as it was dubbed, was rife with artistic, cultural and political activity, as well as communal kitchens and information kiosks. In the "Zocalo" (city centre), one could find a series of enormous tents representing each Mexican province.

The event has been criticized for operating within the current government structure, but the broad range of people it brought together gave it much potential. The "planton" was alive with excitement and hope and anger and determination, and the networking and communication that it facilitated was massive.

For more comment and critique about the planton (which ended in early September with a "National Democratic Conference" called by Andrés Manuel López Obrador), check out the Ross/Gordiano debate on www.narconews.com, Caitlin Manning's article "Direct from Mexico" on the "Attitude Adjustor" blog, or John Gibler's article on www.zmag.org.



OAXACA

For the twenty-fifth year, teachers went on strike in the Zocalo of Oaxaca City for an incremental wage increase. This year, though, a more radical faction of the Teachers' Union presented more ambitious demands, resulting in violent repression from the municipal and federal governments. On July 14, the newly created APPO (The Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca) - a group whose composition reflects the diversity of people that now compose the movement and whose structure mimics the collective procedures of the indigenous communities in the area - declared itself the official governing body of Oaxaca province and asserted the total illegitimacy of Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz (URO). In response, URO's ordered 3,000 police to attack the then-passive demonstrators in mid-June. Collective actions by protesters since then include the takeover of state television and radio stations by a group of Oaxacan women in early July. Recently, they took on the responsibilities of municipal governance such as transportation and municipal decision-making.

For updates and info on the RED ALERT in Oaxaca and the recent Senate response, check out Nancy Davies' articles on narconews.com. For background, try George Salzman's "The Revolutionary Surge in Oaxaca" at www.counterpunch.org.

LA OTRA CAMPANA

The Zapatistas launched the bottom-up, grassroots "Other Campaign" in early 2006 as an alternative to the presidential campaign tour. In La Otra Campana, Zapatista delegates went to towns to listen to the people of Mexico, rather than preach to them. They collected and disseminated stories of governmental corruption and repression from across the country, and compiled demands and suggestions they hope to bring together to create a large and inclusive alternative structure to current government programs.

For more information, read Subcomandante Marcos' recent articles "Zapatistas and the Other Campaign: Pedestrians of History parts I - IV".

ATENCO

On May 4, 2006, the military prevented flower-sellers in the downtown market of Atenco from opening their stalls. The sellers' resistance sparked an influx of local, state and federal military. It has been reported that the military killed, raped and tortured residents of the area. The violence was so awful that the Zapatistas broke off the Other Campaign to head to Atenco to support the people. From the ashes of this horrific event, though, has formed a strong and active grassroots movement against military and governmental oppression that has networked with groups all over Mexico.

For more information on the Atenco massacre, check out the articles by the Prisoners of Atenco or John Ross' article "The 'Dirty War' Returns to Mexico" both on narconews.com.

Francesca Manning spent time visiting the various protest sites in Mexico last summer.

Visit from a Friendly Dictator

General Musharraf's controversial comments expose his fracturing regime

Lorenzo Fiorito

“When a soldier puts on a uniform and he joins the army, is this for fighting or for peacekeeping? What has he joined the army for? He's joined to fight, and when you fight, there are casualties. The nation must be prepared to suffer casualties. So if you're not prepared to suffer casualties as an army, then don't participate in any operation.” -Gen. Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan, on Canadian casualties in Afghanistan

The good dictator's remarks to the CBC elicited outrage from several quarters. Though Mr. Musharraf's views may have shocked some, our Prime Minister's response was to calmly describe Pakistan as “an important ally in the fight against terror.” In the rarefied air of international diplomacy, comments like Musharraf's are generally seen as provocative - and certainly uncharacteristic between professed allies. Not only did Harper's response sidestep the issue at hand; it also belies a rather important detail. In early September, Pakistan signed a truce with the Taliban.

On September 8, Asia Times Online correspondent Syed Saleem Shahzad reported that “while the truce has generated much attention, a more significant development is an underhand deal between pro-al-Qaeda elements and Pakistan in which key al-Qaeda figures will either not be arrested or those already in custody will be set free.” According to Shahzad, “this [truce] has the potential to sour Islamabad's relations with Washington beyond the point of no return.”

A great deal of context is necessary to illuminate Harper's seemingly glib words.

While in the US, Musharraf told reporters that after September 11, 2001, he was given two choices by the US: become an ally in the war on terror, or be “bombed into the Stone Age.” Musharraf's subsequent alliance with the US has created a serious internal division between Musharraf and several key elements of the Pakistani establishment.

On October 9, Shahzad published an article entitled “Taliban put Pakistan on notice,” describing a missile attack close to Musharraf's official residence, and the discovery of remote-controlled rockets near the parliament in Islamabad. He relayed information that “the incidents were a clear show of disapproval...over Musharraf's basking in ‘Washington's charm,’ and that he had not implemented a key aspect of the peace accord - the release of al-Qaeda suspects - despite numerous promises.” Significantly, a speedy investigation has traced immediate responsibility for these attacks to elements within the Pakistani air force.

A followup article indicates that “investigations on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan reveal that much spade work has already been done to help craft an insurgency that best suits Pakistan's national interests.” Shahzad details an internal rift within the Taliban leadership - paralleling the proliferation of “independent” commanders who apparently owe their allegiance to Pakistan.

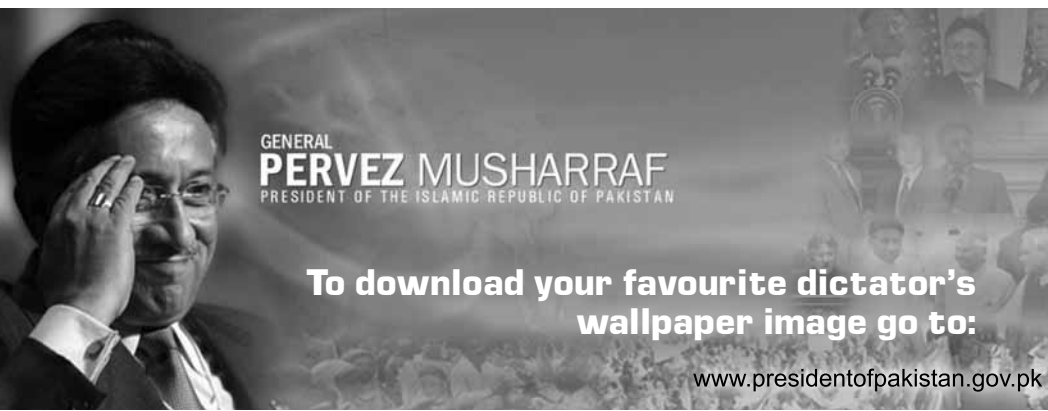
It is widely known that Pakistan's intelligence service, the ISI, helped to create the Taliban during the Cold War, in order to contain Indian influence in Afghanistan. In a US interview, Musharraf admitted that “some dissidents, some retired people who were in

the forefront in the ISI during the period of 1979 to 1989, may be assisting” the insurgency. Several important sources agree that this is a dramatic understatement.

It seems overwhelmingly probable that the powerful Islamic fundamentalist movement, buttressed by the ISI and the army, has taken a very proactive anti-US role within Pakistani foreign policy - consistently undermining Musharraf at home and abroad. Musharraf represents the last and only option for American strategic interests.

There are other considerations for the dictator, too. In an interview with Jon Stewart on The Daily Show, he attributed the deal with the Taliban to a need to prevent the insurgency in the border region from turning into a “Pashtun peoples' movement” - one that needed to be broken up by a strategic alliance. It's not the only internal insurgency that Pakistan is facing: the Balochistan region of Pakistan has spawned a resistance that has claimed more Pakistani military men than the conflict with the Taliban. And Marxists within the Pakistan People's Progressive Party report that the most recent congress of the Jammu-Kashmir National Students' Federation was marked by the election of a Marxist leadership - who declared that the federation would “fight for the socialist revolution.” The congress was attended by several prominent figures of the abortive 1968 socialist revolution in Pakistan.

It all points to the crumbling of a pivotal US ally in the region. A house divided against itself cannot stand. When it finally does collapse, Musharraf's comments will take on new significance: for the region will likely require the blood sacrifice of more Canadian soldiers.



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Fiending for the Pipe

Brendan K. Edwards

When Marc Tison drops into the half-pipe beside Montreal's Olympic Stadium, the sound of spinning wheels on rough concrete echoes all the way over to Sherbrooke Street East. While he effortlessly slides across the lip of the pipe on the tail of his skateboard, Barry Walsh comes hurtling towards him, snapping a front-side air up and over Tison's head. As the video cameras roll and flashes go off, Walsh and Tison land smoothly and cruise back up the other side of the pipe.

This is but one of the many fantastic feats documented in *Pipe Fiends*, a book that celebrates the 30th anniversary of a spot that skaters refer to simply as the "Big O." Published by *Mudscout*, an independent Montreal publisher, the book is packed with photos, interviews and anecdotes revolving around the pipe, which Skateboarder magazine has dubbed one of the "ten spots you gotta skate before you die."

Tison and Walsh school us on how the concrete structure (built to serve as an entrance for the torchbearers during the 1976 Olympics) became a

lightning rod for Montreal skaters, and eventually a high-profile destination for international superstars of the sport like Tony Hawk and the legendary Lance Mountain.

In a time when the majority of the images of skateboarders are beamed in on ESPN broadcasts of the X Games, *Pipe Fiends* is a visceral journey to the roots of an underground culture. In this regard, the book reflects the raw essence of skateboarding, which emerged in abandoned pools in California (see *Dogtown and Z-Boys*) long before city-run skate parks were built. As Tison notes, "It's about finding a structural element in society and just making it your own and getting your fix."

Last summer, the authors' dedication to the pipe was tested when the Montreal company Saputo Inc. announced plans to build a new soccer field for the Montreal Impact on the Olympic grounds. Tison and Walsh have mounted a "Save the Pipe" campaign.

Check out:

www.mudscout.com

www.savethepipe.blogspot.com.



Co-author Barry Walsh busts a frontside grab.

A night of music and cultural resistance with the world-renowned Palestinian band

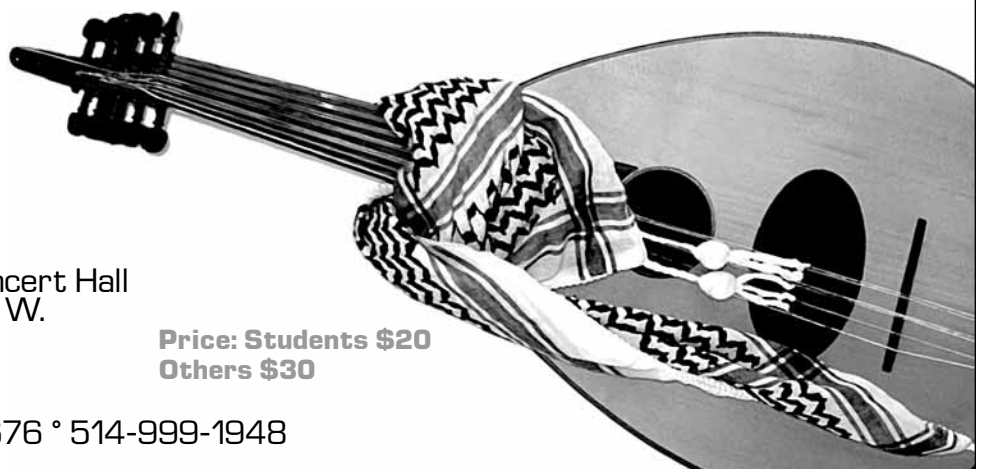
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Tête-à-Tête

4 reasons why François Saillant is coming to an affordable housing development near you

Lillian Boctor



Quebec Solidaire's François Saillant.
Photo by: Lillian Boctor

Veteran social-housing activist François Saillant was elected to represent Québec solidaire in Montreal's Rosemont riding in October. He is the coordinator for the social-housing advocacy group Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain (FRAPRU), and has been a proponent for affordable housing for Montreal's low-income residents for the past 27 years. Saillant is the author of *La Régie du logement après 25 ans: un chien de garde efficace?* and has also worked as a journalist for the weekly newspaper *En Lutte*. Lobbying,

civil disobedience, research and tenant organizing are some tactics that FRAPRU uses to address housing inequalities and advocate for housing as a right for all people.

Siafu: What kinds of projects are you currently working on?

One of our main battles right now is the \$187 million federal social-housing money. We are worried about the use of that money. We had an answer from the Quebec Finance Minister that they have already invested money in social housing, so the federal money will go to the treasury to replace these expenses, not to poor or homeless people. And even if the money is going to a new investment in housing, we are worried that the minister responsible for housing wants to use that money for a lot of little programs that will not create new affordable housing. Another issue is the need to continue the rental supplements for people who have received emergency help in the last few years—people who were homeless. These supplements are supposed to end this year, and if the government does not deal with this by next July 1, there are more than 4,000 people who will have big difficulties.

Siafu: What changes have you seen in Montreal's housing situation since you started working with FRAPRU 27 years ago?

The quality of the apartments has improved if you compare it to that of the end of the 70s. The rent is a lot higher than it was. There are more people that pay more than 30 to 80 percent of their income for rent. There were a lot of apartment demolitions at the end of the 70s to make big buildings and new hotels, and that has changed. Now, we lose a lot of apartments because of condominium and hotel conversions. The ways we lose apartments have changed, but the

results for the poor are exactly the same. Housing is still not recognized as a right; it is seen as merchandise.

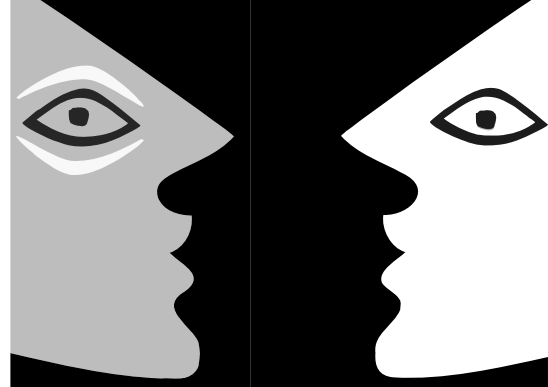
Siafu: How many housing units are needed to solve the problem in the province of Quebec?

We have an objective from our last convention that was held in June. In the province of Quebec, there are 120,000 apartments that are social housing—co-op and non-profit public housing. But that's not a lot if you compare it to other countries. For example, in Holland, 60 percent of the rental apartments are social housing. Less than 10 percent of apartments in Quebec are social housing. We want to increase that to 20 percent. That means 120,000-150,000 more units of social housing in Quebec.

Siafu: What do you tell people who ask why their taxes should pay for other peoples' housing?

A person can think that they have their own house now and they won't have difficulties in the future, but I'm not sure that that is the case. I remember in the early 80s when we had the economic crisis and the interest rate was very high. A lot of people lost their homes back then. Without any help available for tenants, and a lack of social housing, this person can be affected too. This funding is an insurance that now profits other people, but you or your children, or your mother or father, might need this insurance one day.

To find out more about FRAPRU go to: www.frapru.qc.ca



8 Ways to maintain your bike & keep your sanity while peddling in the winter

Tim McSorley

As winter approaches, many of us pack their bicycles away, switching to buses, metro or cars. But it doesn't have to be that way. More Montrealers are realising that cycling throughout the winter can be easier than you think, and more enjoyable than riding underground. Siafu sat down with CanBike certified safety instructor Wade Eide to bring you the skinny on winter biking.

1. Body

Many winter cyclists prefer a mountain bike body because it is sturdier and more rugged. The salt and snow mean more wear and tear and more rust on your bike.

2. Tires

There is much debate around thin or thicker tires, but Eide and icebikes.com recommend thicker tires. While skinny tires may cut through snow more easily, thicker tires provide better traction for slick winter road conditions.

3. Brakes & shift cables

Keep brakes and shift cables well lubricated. Grime from slush can gunk them up, and excess moisture can cause them to freeze. To keep either from seizing up, spray WD40 through the brake cable guides and on your shift cables. If your brakes do freeze while riding, try a long, hard pull on the brake levers

4. Chain

Your chain will rust more quickly than in the summer; make sure to grease it everyday. Cleaning your chain once a week also helps it work more smoothly by removing any excess slush and salt.

5. Fenders

Fenders are a must in slushy, snowy weather. The longer the fenders, the better. To prevent snow from accumulating under your fenders, try bending the rear of the fender



Graphic by Aimee Van Drimmelen.

closer to the tire to block snow, or spray some WD40 on the underside.

6. Pedals

Metal pedals may rust faster, but plastic pedals can also snap in the cold. Whichever you use, make sure they are sturdy. Eide uses clips because of the slippery conditions, but says it is more of a personal preference.

7. Lights

The importance of good lights cannot be overstated. Most winter biking is night biking, so the need to be visible is essential. Look for bright lights, at the front and at the back. Bring batteries inside when not in use since the cold can drain them.

8. Mirror

Being all bundled up makes it harder to check traffic; a good mirror helps with peripheral vision.

Locks

Bike locks can accumulate moisture causing them to freeze. Avoid problems by applying a little WD40 before leaving the house or bring a small bottle of de-icer with you.

Clothing

Be careful not to overdress; or soon you'll be a sweaty mess. A tuque, scarf, t-shirt, fleece and windbreaker, along with double-layer nylon pants should be enough.

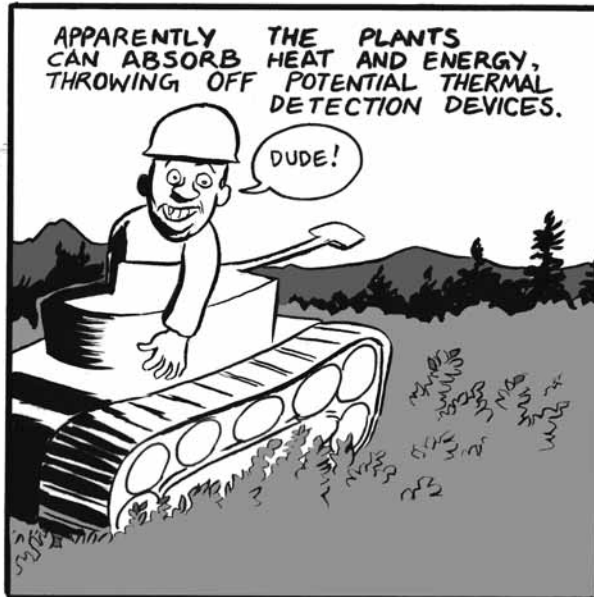
Winter storage

Always a tough decision. Leaving your bike outside pits it against the elements. Bringing it inside can be helpful, but beware of melting ice and snow: if your bike is still wet when you bring it back out, everything may freeze up. Make sure to brush/dry it off when you get home.

Ice

Ice is the bane of winter cyclists' existence. Keep your eyes on the road and always go for traction. Look for either exposed pavement or areas with thick snow; be aware that ice isn't always visible. If you do hit ice, stay relaxed and loose and try to move your wheel accordingly. Avoid sudden braking or swerving. And, if all else fails don't be scared to bail into a snow bank.

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